

Cal Poly Views
Wines with
Dr. Ralph Hutchinson

Cal Poly Pomona University Library

Wines Summary

Cal Poly Views was a weekly interview series broadcast on radio station KWOW-AM. Episodes were 15 minutes long and were hosted by Cal Poly Pomona Director of News and Publications, Ed Pierce, in conversation with Cal Poly Pomona faculty or administrators on general interest topics.

Dr. Ralph Hutchinson was a professor of Economics and Cal Poly Pomona. He also taught wine classes at CPP through the continuing education program and in the Hotel, Restaurant and Travel Management Department. He worked as consultant wineries and judged wine competitions at the Los Angeles County Fair.

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Subject Headings

Wine and wine making

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Cal Poly Views Wines with Dr. Ralph Hutchinson

January 13, 1986

*Interview conducted by Ed Pierce
Transcribed by Lorecel Gravino*

EP: Hello everyone, welcome to KWOW's presentation of "Cal Poly Views," fifteen minutes each week devoted to interviews concerning subjects of current general interest and featuring faculty or administrators from Cal Poly Pomona. This is your host Ed Pierce talking today with Ralph Hutchinson, professor of Economics at Cal Poly Pomona and together we'll discuss a topic that has economic ramifications. But it's quite different: it's "Wines and what wine, shall I serve?"

EP: Our guest, Dr. Ralph Hutchinson, in addition to a very busy schedule as a teacher of economics, is a consultant with a Napa Valley winery, working with several wineries in the development of geographical name system for the United States. He began teaching wine classes here in 1972 in continuing education and approximately 10 years ago with the development of the Hotel Restaurant and now, Travel Management Department, began teaching classes on wine and spirits management. He is a judge at the Los Angeles County Fair wine competition for ten years and for the last two and the next year at least, is serving as the assistant head judge for that competition. With all that, welcome Ralph.

RH: Thank you. It's nice to be here.

EP: A lot of questions about wine, more than 15 minutes' worth, but what's the most frequently asked question of you regarding wine?

RH: I think most people want to know: what is my favorite wine?

EP: And your answer?

RH: What are we having for dinner?

EP: Very good! Is there, though too much of a mystique that's been built, purposely built, permitted to be created, and is now maybe being broken down a little bit, about wine and pleasure of wine?

RH: I think historically that there was too much of mystique creation, deliberately done and in the last 15 years or so at least, there's been an effort not only by people outside the wine industry, certainly by people inside the wine industry, to break that mystique. Leon Adams, who founded the Wine Institute some 50 years ago, has said repeatedly that we do a really good job with Sunday wines, it's time we started working on everyday wines and most of us agree with that.

EP: If, for example I prefer white wine to red, which is a true statement, I probably do. May I serve a white wine with any entree and then—I'll put a semicolon and start and twist it another way: What is the reason that people said no, you must use a red wine with beef and a white wine with poultry and fish and so forth? There was a reason, I presume?

RH: Well, to answer the first half of your question, first, if you like white wine with everything, by all means I think you should serve white wine with everything, drink white wine with everything. Historically and contemporaneously, the reasons for the rules, white wine with fish and poultry and red wine with heavier foods, is a matter of thinking of several course meals in which palate fatigues and you just simply get tired. So that as you build a meal from consommé to dessert, you pattern the wines to match. You go from light to heavy and the wines go from light to heavy, and a typical many-course meal, would begin with say fish, and end up with something such as lamb. And in that case as the food becomes heavier and spicier; the wines ought to become heavier and spicier to match.

EP: One enhances the other.

RH: One enhances the other. Wine is a food, makes other foods taste better, I think.

EP: You told me of an example, maybe worth repeating, of you would never use what was it—a red wine with lobster?

RH: I wouldn't serve a red wine with lobster or crab, anything which grew up in an ocean environment. Because those seafoods are full of iodine, there's no way to avoid it apparently, and what red wine does alongside lobster is to bring the iodine flavor to the fore and if you like iodine then, by all means I think you should have red wine with lobster. But if you detest iodine as I do, then don't, and then that's essentially the reasons that you don't, you wouldn't serve a red wine with a lot of seafood.

EP: But you more, or less say, if you enjoy a wine consume it.

RH: By all means. I would point out that the classic dish is Coq au Vin, which is I understood to be chicken in red wine or red wine sauce.

EP: That's interesting. Is it valid, has it been valid for people to say that the wine from France is always better than wine from California? How do you compare French or California, or French and American?

RH: Well, there may have been a time 50 years ago that we could have said that French wines were better than California but that day is long past and think of it sort of a “Smart Alec” answer to that that California produces the best California wines and the French produced the best French wines. In terms of, but just purely in terms of quality comparisons, good wine is where

you find it. California makes excellent wines. French make excellent wines. Australia makes excellent wines.

EP: I was going ask, speaking of imports, we probably think of imported wine as from France. But you got imported wine from Australia New Zealand, Japan.

RH: Well, Japanese wines are fruit wines for most part.

EP: Yah, compare—we think of American wine probably as California wine, unless we're from upstate New York. And maybe we get a little parochial about our preferences geographically, but you tell me there's wine being produced in Texas?

RH: That's true, about 15 wineries and about 3,000 acres of grapes in Texas now.

EP: And some kind of an American or American wine grower- French joint venture in that area.

RH: In the Lubbock area, there's a joint venture with the French. University of Texas and a French private company are planting grapes and they actually have their first wines on the market.

EP: And we do have wineries in Washington, don't we?

RH: About 40, 45 wineries in Washington.

EP: How many—you've given me a number from Washington—but how many wineries in California?

RH: Somewhere between 6- and 700. No, I'm not sure and I'm not sure that there's a current count on it.

EP: If I am a small wine grower—vintner is that correct?

RH: Vintner, is a term we use now yah.

EP: Do I—is it fairly easy for me to successfully market my wine?

RH: I think it's difficult if you're small to market your wines.

EP: How is it done?

RH: Many of the smaller wineries and I would point out that most of the wineries are small, 25,000 cases a year or less. Many of them market directly, many of them also use distributors or wholesalers to put their product into restaurant accounts and into some retail accounts.

EP: Is it even hard to go to a wholesaler and get them to handle your wine and distribute it?

RH: I don't know about that. I suspect in some cases it is, particularly with wineries which are very small.

EP: Regardless of the size of the winery, the secret of making good wine I presume, is attention and quality controls.

RH: And patience.

EP: Is some wine more difficult to make than other wine, regardless of the size?

RH: The general statement that you could make is that white wines are always more difficult than red wines because they're unforgiving. If you make a mistake with white wine and white wine will continue that mistake into the bottle. Very often it's possible to correct mistakes with red wine.

EP: Talk a minute about what the words dry and sweet mean in describing a wine.

RH: Well, dry simply means an absence of sugar, an absence of the perception of sugar in a wine and sweet means that there is some sugar left unfermented; wine is sweet to the taste. But those aren't really clear-cut terms. Very often a consumer will say "I really like these dry wines," and they may have as much as 1 1/2% sugar and that's sweet. That's really given that the threshold is about half a percent.

EP: Can you give me some examples of what you would term sweet wines and then some in the middle and some of the dry side?

RH: Well, a good many California Chenin Blancs and a good many California Harrisburg Rieslings are, have anywhere from 1^{1/2} to 3% residual sugar and that's sweet. Most of the Chardonnays, to take an example of another white wine, most of the Chardonnays in California are dry, which means they have less than half of 1% sugar left unfermented. The red wines such as Zinfandel, Cabernet Sauvignon and Pinot Noirs are for the most part dry.

EP: Gewürztraminer fits more to that to the sweeter side?

RH: Gewürztraminer is a difficult one to pre-judge without opening the bottle. They vary all the way from the extremely dry Alsatian high alcohol wines to those which would be more in German style, slightly sweet to a bit fruitier. There's no standard pattern.

EP: Is there an American equivalent of the German Liebfraumilch, in taste?

RH: Not that I know of.

EP: And a Chablis is which side of the spectrum?

RH: Well, Chablis is not a very meaningful term.

EP: Almost generic?

RH: It's a generic term in California or in the United States as far as that goes. If you used the term to apply to a white wine from France called Chablis, then it's very specific. It's Chardonnay and must be 100% Chardonnay. There are no rules in California about what you can call Chablis.

EP: Aren't there so however about labeling? An example I'm thinking of, if I put Napa Valley wine on my label, I can't have grown that wine in some other state.

RH: There've always been some general understood rules, now there are some precise rules since 1978.

EP: And that's a part of the study that you're participating in establishing what a geographical name means.

RH: That's true. That's an ongoing process it's likely to go on for another 10 or 15 years, maybe even longer because the rules are general. The guidelines are general and as we work with it we find that we are developing our concepts of what this ought to mean.

EP: This is a judgment and I'm trying not to make you do that but how are the wines that are grown in Temecula area? We think of wines in California, Central Valley, Napa, Sonoma, so forth but what about the Temecula wines?

RH: Well, as I said before I think good wine is where you find them. So, very good wines coming out of Temecula, about 15 wineries down there.

EP: What—Ralph—is required to grow good grapes for wine?

RH: Basically, I think the most important thing is what we call microclimate. Temperatures have to be moderate during the growing season. Grapes don't like extremes of heat. They don't like high temperatures neither do they like very low temperatures. It simply won't do anything at temperatures below 50 degrees Fahrenheit. Second most important thing, it would seem to me, is drainage. Grapes like to have well-drained soil, beyond that an attentive vineyard manager.

EP: OK, second part of the question Ralph is, if you have good grapes does that guarantee good wine?

RH: No.

EP: I anticipate that's what you'd say.

RH: To make good wine, to make excellent wine, you must have excellent grapes, but if unless you have an attentive, patient, talented, winemaker it's possible to take excellent grapes and make very ordinary wine out of them.

EP: Can wine be stored indefinitely?

RH: No. Red wines lend themselves to storage more than white wines do and there are some red wines, rather heavy full-bodied red wines, which have been around for 50 to 75 years and are still palatable.

EP: Is there a red wine heavier than a burgundy?

RH: Burgundy is—if you think of French Burgundy—they're not heavy, actually. Bordeauxs, I think, are heavier than Burgundys. It's a misconception among good many Americans that Burgundys are heavy wines, actually they're fairly light and delicate for the most part.

EP: Is it easier to keep some wines than others? I mean, a shelf life at home is easier for some people in a normal [house] that doesn't have a thermostatically controlled wine cellar to retain some wines.

RH: Well, rather than answer “Is it easier to keep some wines than others?” Let me generalize that a bit to say that most important thing for storing wine at home is even temperatures. The textbooks will tell you 55 degrees is essential. If you must store wines at 70 degrees, do so but try to prevent extreme fluctuations so that the wine goes from 50 degrees one day to 90 degrees the next. All that happens if you store the wine at 70 degrees is [it will] mature a little more rapidly.

EP: If wine is retained in excess of the proper period—and I'm not saying too long because I don't know what that is—

RH: I don't either.

EP: What happens in the bottle? Unopened bottle?

RH: Wines, like people grow old and go downhill. So, this isn't something that happens abruptly, it's something that happens over a period of time and they simply go back to their components from which they began. Then they lose their characteristics that you would describe as wine like.

EP: What about a carbonated Champagne on shelf life?

RH: I think when sparkling wines are sent to market, they're ready to be drank for the most part. So, you can store them within limits, for say two or three years, but it's not advisable. The winery did that for you and they're ready to drink when they send them to the market.

EP: Well, thank you Ralph Hutchison very interesting interview. And thank you ladies and gentlemen for listening to this week's edition of "Cal Poly Views." Fifteen minutes devoted to discussing topics of current and general interest. If there are subjects which you would like to hear discussed by faculty or administrative experts from Cal Poly Pomona please write to: Cal Poly Views, Office of News and Publications, 3801 W Temple Ave., Pomona 91768. We hope you'll join us again next week at the same time for another interesting interview, when KWOW presents "Cal Poly Views." This is your host, Ed Pierce, speaking.

End of interview

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